

# AVON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## PINE GROVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

GAIL DAHLING-HENCH  
Principal

DEBRA GRAINSKY  
Assistant Principal

### Public Hearing Written Testimony Bill 930

February 23, 2011

My name is Gail Dahling-Hench, and I am principal of Pine Grove School in Avon, CT. We are a Pre-K to Grade 4 school with 647 students. Prior to becoming an administrator in Avon, I educated young children in both Connecticut and Colorado. I hold dual certification in both early childhood and elementary education. I have worked with the Connecticut Association of Schools to prepare the position statements filed today because I believe in the importance of providing all children in the state of Connecticut with their best possible start in formal education.

You have the important task of shaping educational policy for the state of Connecticut – I have the moral and professional obligation to ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their highest level of learning. Therefore it is important to examine the conditions that exist from the moment a child starts his/her education. The Kindergarten Entrance Inventory was developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education to comply with Public Act 05-245. This inventory attempts to measure the range of skills among learners as children enter kindergarten across the state. The results continue to indicate that our young children are not all starting school with the same developmental skills. This brings into question the degree and quality of pre-kindergarten education or experience available in urban and suburban settings. The ability for parents to withhold enrolling their child until the age of seven, coupled with the enrollment of children who do not turn five until January 1, creates a readiness gap from a child's first day of kindergarten. I have examined our school demographics and made the following observations:

- Pine Grove's population is 77% white, 12% Asian, 5% Black, 5% Hispanic, and >1% American Indian. Of these students, 3% of students who are white qualify for free and reduced lunch, while 18% of ethnically diverse students qualify.
- From the broadest view, twenty percent (20%) of Pine Grove's school population chose to defer enrollment from the Connecticut cut-off date of (five by) December 31. Of these students, ninety-one percent (91%) of this group is white and the remaining 9% represent the other four ethnic groups.

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Together, we can help all of Connecticut's children have the best possible start in school by providing an equitable platform of readiness that is not dependent upon a parent's ability to finance preschool, or withhold their children until the age of seven. Connecticut's children deserve to enter school with a commensurate level of readiness to learn. Thank you for your time today and your efforts to offer all of Connecticut's children the opportunity to have their best possible start in school. As a representative of the Connecticut Association of Schools, we call upon you to institute a kindergarten enrollment date where students will turn five by October 1, while concurrently examining access to quality pre-kindergarten education and limiting the window of voluntary enrollment delay for kindergarten.

*Gail Dahling-Hench*  
Signature

*February 23, 2011*  
Date